

Current Class: CONFIDENTIAL
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ACTION H-01

INFO LOG-00 WHA-00 SS-00 SAS-00 /001W
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P 271844Z OCT 03
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3534

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003705

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2013
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, KDEM, VE
SUBJECT: CODEL BALLENGER'S MEETING WITH VENEZUELAN
PRESIDENT CHAVEZ

REF: CARACAS 03674

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB CHARLES S. SHAPIRO FOR REASONS 1.5 (C) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY

CODEL BALLENGER AND I MET WITH PRESIDENT CHAVEZ FOR 90
MINUTES ON THE AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 23. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY
PLEASED TO SEE REPRESENTATIVES CASS BALLENGER, WILLIAM
DELAHUNT AND GREG MEEKS. CHAVEZ WAS AS RELAXED AND
SELF-CONFIDENT AS I HAVE EVER SEEN HIM. CHAVEZ
 ASKING THE CODEL TO HELP ENSURE THAT INTERNATIONAL
OBSERVERS COME TO VENEZUELA FOR THE OPPOSITION'S RECALL
PETITION DRIVE ON NOVEMBER 28-DECEMBER 1. END SUMMARY.

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2. (C) C-SPAN PROJECT

THE CODEL'S MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO BRIEF CHAVEZ ON THEIR
INITIATIVE TO CREATE A C-SPAN TYPE CHANNEL TO BROADCAST
SESSIONS OF THE VENEZUELAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (REF). THEY
STRESSED THAT THE INITIATIVE WOULD PROVIDE UNFILTERED NEWS TO
THE VOTERS AND WOULD NOT BE CONTROLLED EITHER BY THE
GOVERNMENT OF THE OPPOSITION. NOT ONLY COULD THE VOTERS
REACH THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR
REPRESENTATIVES, BUT THEY WOULD ALSO KNOW IF THE MEDIA WERE
TO DISTORT INFORMATION. CHAVEZ LISTENED CAREFULLY, ASKED
QUESTIONS, AND APPEARED INTERESTED. HE TOLD THE CODEL THAT
HE WOULD ASK FIFTH REPUBLIC MOVEMENT (MVR) DEPUTIES NICHOLAS
MADURO AND CALIXTO ORTEGA FOR A BRIEFING BEFORE ENDORSING THE
PROJECT.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
DATE/CASE ID: 31 AUG 2004 200400110

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3. (U) BOSTON GROUP

CHAVEZ PRAISED THE BOSTON GROUP'S EFFORTS. INFORMED THAT THE NEXT SESSION OF THE FULL BOSTON GROUP WAS BEING PLANNED FOR VENEZUELA - POSSIBLY IN CANAIMA NATIONAL PARK - FOR JANUARY OR FEBRUARY, HE JOKINGLY SAID HE MIGHT ATTEND THE SESSION, AN IDEA THE CODEL WELCOMED.

4. (C) RECALL OBSERVERS

CHAVEZ TOLD THE CODEL THAT HE IS CONVINCED THAT HE WILL ULTIMATELY WIN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS BEING INITIATED BY GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION RECALL PETITION DRIVES IN LATE NOVEMBER. HE EXPLAINED THAT AS RESULT OF THE ECONOMIC UPTURN, THE SUCCESSES HIS GOVERNMENT HAS HAD, AND MIDDLE CLASS DOUBTS ABOUT THE OPPOSITION, HIS POSITIVE NUMBERS IN THE POLLS, GAVE THE OPPOSITION ONLY A 50 PERCENT CHANCE OF COLLECTING THE 2.8 MILLION VALID SIGNATURES NEEDED TO INITIATE THE RECALL. HE REQUESTED THAT THE CONGRESSMEN HELP GET INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS TO VENEZUELA FOR BOTH PETITION DRIVES, BUT ESPECIALLY THE OPPOSITION EFFORT ON NOVEMBER 28-DECEMBER 1. HE REASONED THAT BY NOVEMBER 30 IT WILL BE OBVIOUS THAT THE OPPOSITION CANNOT MEET THE MINIMUM NUMBER NECESSARY TO TRIGGER THE RECALL AND THAT HE FEARS THAT RADICAL MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION WILL RESORT TO VIOLENCE, BUT BLAME THE VIOLENCE ON PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AND HIS SUPPORTERS. THE CODEL MEMBERS SAID THEY WOULD HELP WITH OBSERVERS. REP. MEEKS SAID HE WOULD PASS THE REQUEST ON TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS, THE CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS AND THE CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN CAUCUS AT THEIR JOINT CONFERENCE THE WEEKEND OF OCTOBER 25-26. I SUGGESTED THAT CHAVEZ ASK THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO INVITE OBSERVERS AND ISSUE CREDENTIALS.

5. (C) GOV AND THE PRIVATE MEDIA

CHAVEZ EXPLAINED IN GREAT DETAIL HOW THE GOV'S ACTION AGAINST GLOBOVISION WAS ABSOLUTELY LEGAL. HE NOTED WITH IRONY THAT NO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION, NGO, OR GOVERNMENT SPOKE OUT WHEN THE MAYOR OF METROPOLITAN CARACAS TEMPORARILY SHUT DOWN A COMMUNITY TV STATION OR WHEN THE OPPOSITION TOOK THE GOVERNMENT TV STATION OFF THE AIR ON APRIL 11. [REDACTED]

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7. (U) MISCELLANEOUS

- MR. BALLENGER GAVE PRESIDENT CHAVEZ A LETTER FROM US INVESTOR ROBERT COOPER AND ASKED THAT PRESIDENT CHAVEZ MEET WITH HIM.

- CHAVEZ SAID THAT WHEN A BOMB WENT OFF AT THE ARMY FACILITY ACROSS THE STREET FROM MIRAFLORES PALACE ON 09/19/03, THE ENTIRE BUILDING SHOOK AND HE THOUGHT IT WAS A MORTAR ATTACK.

- CHAVEZ TOLD THE CODEL HE COULD SUPPORT A "DIET" FTAA, BUT NOT THE COMPREHENSIVE FTAA AS PROPOSED BY THE US.

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10. (U) NOTE

CODEL BALLENGER DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR THIS
MESSAGE BEFORE THEIR DEPARTURE FROM CARACAS.
SHAPIRO

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